

Nebraska Judicial News

Special Events Publication of the Nebraska Supreme Court

2006

Nebraska's Adoption Day Adds Communities, Attracts Front Page Media Attention



Judge Michael Offner with Michaela, Autumn, and their adoptive parents following their adoption hearing at Hastings's first National Adoption Day celebration.

Michaela Stephens wiped tears from behind her glasses as her Health and Human Services protection and safety worker, Chris Grealish, hugged her repeating, "It's done . . . it's done." At ages 15 and 12, Michaela and her younger sister, Autumn, had finally become permanent members of the Stephens family from Doniphan, Nebraska.

During the hearing Judge Michael Offner told the family that many times the court has younger children in adoption hearings who do not remember much about the day. Since Michaela and Autumn are older, their adoptions were even more special because the girls will always remember the day when they joined Nancy Stephens and her husband, Sam Sampson, to create a

new family. Acknowledging Michaela's maturity, Judge Offner asked if she wanted the adoption to take place, and she responded in a voice that was firm and strong, "Yes I do, very much."

All together a dozen children from Adams and Clay Counties had their adoptions finalized Saturday morning, November 19, 2005, by Judge Offner and Judge Jack Ott at the Hastings courthouse.

After the adoption hearings, every child, along with their parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and friends ventured over to the city auditorium to play carnival games—complete with prizes—eat lunch, receive individualized bags filled with gifts, and listen to speeches.



Adoption Day 2005 - Nebraska

Omaha - Lincoln - Hastings

*Shrine clown
entertains
children awaiting
adoption
hearings outside
courtrooms at
Lancaster
County juvenile
court.*



Special guests included Hastings Mayor Matt Rossen, who calls himself a proudly adopted child, State Senator Carroll Burling (an adoptive parent), Sonshine the Clown, and the Kool-Aid man.

Earlier that same morning in Omaha (the original site for National Adoption Day celebrations), the full complement of Douglas County juvenile court judges celebrated their sixth year of celebrations with the adoption of 50 foster children. Holding hearings in Omaha were Judges Elizabeth Crnkovich, Vernon Daniels, Doug Johnson, Christopher Kelly, and Wadie Thomas.

A special guest speaker came to Omaha's celebration in an entirely new role: In prior years as an adoption specialist, Gwen Howard could be seen running

back and forth between courtrooms escorting her families to their hearings. This year, as an adoptive parent and State Senator representing Omaha, she took the podium along with Nebraska Adoption Saturday originator, Judge Thomas, to welcome guests to the Omaha press conference.

Kicking off the Lincoln celebration, Gov. Dave Heineman arrived at the courthouse early Saturday morning to proclaim November as Adoption Month in Nebraska.

"It's a special privilege to see the excitement of these children and their parents-to-be as they begin new lives with their new families," Governor Heineman said. "Every child deserves the chance to grow up in a safe environment that provides love and support, and I applaud the efforts of individuals in our state who have opened their homes to children in need."

During Lincoln's inaugural celebration, 14 foster children were adopted into permanent families. Lancaster County Juvenile Court Judge Linda Porter hosted the event with the assistance of her fellow Juvenile Court Judges Tom Dawson and Toni Thorson.

The events, planned by different individuals in each city, have several differences in their celebrations, but also have many similarities. All are held on National Adoption Day, the third

*Lancaster County
National
Adoption Day
officials: (l to r)
Lincoln's Mayor
Colleen Seng,
Judge Linda
Porter, HHSS
Director Nancy
Montinez, Judge
Tom Dawson,
Gov. Dave
Heineman, and
Judge Toni
Thorson.*



Adoption Day 2005 - Nebraska

Omaha - Lincoln - Hastings



Everyone comes together to see adoption hearings which are accompanied by hugs and smiles and pictures – lots of pictures. Best of all, there are newly formed families in each community, permanent families for very deserving children.

Judge Thomas said, “I’m very excited that Lincoln and Hastings participated in the day, I would love to see it spread to all corners of the state.”

Omaha Girl Scouts packed 50 backpacks with gifts for the new adoptees.

Many, many months ago when Judge Offner first announced

his participation in National Adoption Day, he was quick to add that it would be a one-time event due to the extraordinary number of children needing adoption hearings in the fall of 2005. But by the time the cake was served at the city auditorium party, the Hastings caseworkers and CASA workers were making plans to expand the party into Grand Island and Kearney in 2006. In the end, Judge Offner willingly agreed that this would be the first of what will become an annual event.

Saturday in November, all are hosted by volunteer judges, and parties with plenty of food are planned. There are lawyers and judges and grandparents and cousins, along with case workers and teachers and public officials in attendance. Volunteers range from court staff to social services workers to CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) volunteers and members of the Junior League.

Approximately 3,400 children in Nebraska live in foster homes; 166 of those children are adoption-eligible and in need of adoptive homes and families. More information on becoming a foster or adoptive parent is available by calling 800-7-PARENT or 800-772-7368. The greatest need is for families interested in adopting siblings, older children, or children with mental or physical handicaps.

(Left) National Adoption Day participant is interviewed by KHAS TV in Hastings during civic auditorium reception. (Right) Banner displayed on the front window of the courthouse to welcome celebration-goers.





Adoption Day 2005 - Nebraska

Omaha - Lincoln - Hastings

About the Day

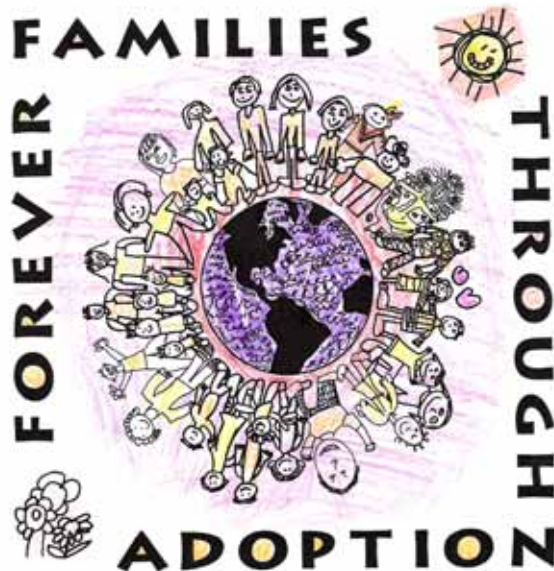
Judge Wadie Thomas thanks volunteers and families during the 2004 Omaha adoption day celebration.



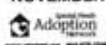
National Adoption Day is a collective national effort to raise awareness of the 119,000 children in foster care waiting to find permanent, loving families. For the last six years, National Adoption Day sponsors have celebrated the dreams come true of thousands of children by working with courts, judges, attorneys, and advocates to finalize adoptions and find permanent, loving homes for children in foster care.

National Adoption Day is celebrated every year on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. In 2005, judges, attorneys, adoption professionals, child welfare agencies and advocates in 45 states and the District of Columbia helped to finalize the adoptions of more than 3,300 children from foster care.

Nebraska's National Adoption Day, or Adoption Saturday, began in the Douglas County Separate Juvenile Court through then-Presiding Judge Wadie Thomas. The first celebration was held in November 2000 and involved 10 adoptions, which Judge Thomas was able to handle alone. The 2005 celebration involved 50 adoptees with all of Douglas County's juvenile court judges presiding over hearings.



NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH!



2005 poster sponsored by:
Hastings for Adoption and Children's Services
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
www.hastings.org 781-488-4744

Lincoln Social Services
of Nebraska and Urban Ministries
www.lscs.org 402-491-1171

Photo Credits

Omaha:
Separate Juvenile Court Administrator, Martia Grebl

Lincoln:
State Court Administrator Administrative Assistant, Marcie Brush

Hastings:
Lincoln Southeast High School Citizenship Issues Students, Dani Hochman and Andie Hansen



NEBRASKA SUPREME COURT
Office of Public Information

Contact: Janet Bancroft | (402) 471-3730 | jhammer@nsc.state.ne.us

www.nebraskacourt.com